

**2014 NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
SPRING SESSION**

**NAVAJO NATION OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT**



STATE OF THE
NAVAJO NATION

APRIL 21, 2014
NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL CHAMBER



WE MUST WORK TOGETHER FOR OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

The Rangeland Improvement Act will become the roots in our efforts to address drought, overgrazing, feral horse roundups, and range management. We must get input from the Navajo people.

The Former Bennett Freeze Area is beginning to thaw after more than 44 years of remaining frozen in time. We must band together to help residents of this area build new homes and make improvements to existing housing stock.

Uranium cleanup from the former Kerr-McGee uranium mines will finally begin remediation with \$1 billion in funding from the bankruptcy settlement from Tronox, Inc. The U.S. Department of Justice made the announcement in early April.

Our Navajo veterans that proudly served in the U.S. Armed Forces will finally get the respect and recognition from their faithful service to this Nation. The Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs has begun constructing 75 homes spread across all five agencies of the Nation. The goal is 300 homes in four years.

The Navajo Nation Washington, D.C. Office continues to track legislation affecting the Navajo Nation. Such legislation includes bills regarding education. We must find new ways to provide scholarships for our college students in colleges and universities across the country. They are our future.



Saluting our Navajo Vets.

The Navajo Department of Veterans Affairs has started the construction of 400 new homes for our veterans in the next four years.



Observe the Golden Rule.

On April 5, 2014, Navajo Nation Vice President Rex Lee Jim hosted Golden Rule Day. The event featured guest speakers and workshops on conflict resolution, peacemaking and difficult conversations.



2014 SPRING SESSION STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION.

Speaker Pro Temp, Delegates of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, my fellow Navajo People:

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today for the start of the 2014 Navajo Nation Council spring session.

Spring is a time of rebirth and renewed strength. Such is the case with this Council session, which will undoubtedly set the tone for the months to come.

Today, somewhere on the Navajo Nation, one of our Navajo elders woke up early to let the sheep out of the corral to forage for what little vegetation is available on our rangeland.

Elsewhere, a Navajo family gathers around the needs of their father's deteriorating health. He worked for decades mining uranium and is now suffering from its effects on his health and well being.

In the Former Bennett Freeze Area, Navajo families continue the struggle they have lived for more than 48 years. Their challenge is to survive the bureaucracy and red tape that's clogged any progress on this portion of the Nation.

Throughout our land, Navajo children step aboard yellow school buses and stare out the window daydreaming of a better life.

At universities and colleges across the country, our Navajo students pursuing a higher education tighten their belts and sit down to another bowl of ramen noodles for dinner.

Across the Navajo Nation, a veteran who once stood on the frontlines to protect this country and our way of life wakes

up to substandard housing and wonders if he will ever find the respect that he once had as a soldier.

Today, we sit united inside this historic Navajo Nation Council Chamber and think of the impact we have on lives of our Navajo people and what we must do to keep our government moving forward.

TAKING THE INITIATIVE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR OUR FUTURE.

For the Navajo elder that woke up early to let the sheep out to graze on barren lands, we are working on land conservation.

The Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act is reshaping outdated policies and empowering our Navajo Department of Agriculture and Department of Resource Enforcement with authorities to truly begin conservation of our tribal lands.

However, we must still take the Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act out to the chapters and include the people's vision on this effort. Many have thoughts on this issue.

For the families suffering from exposure to uranium and radiation, they will be happy to know that the Navajo Nation received \$1 billion for the cleanup of abandoned uranium mines.

On April 3, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a \$5.15 billion settlement against Tronox, Incorporated. The Nation received a percentage of the settlement for cleanup of radioactive uranium waste left behind by former parent company Kerr-McGee.

One billion dollars may sound like a lot of money, but it will only provide cleanup of 49 abandoned uranium mines. There are 300 sites remaining, from a list of more than 1,000. At least this is a start.



Work on Capitol Hill.

The Navajo Nation Washington, D.C. Office continues to track legislation on Capitol Hill that affects tribal programs back home. We are working hard to ensure the latest news on education, health, transportation and other areas of interest are covered.



Thank you Senator John Pinto.

For two decades, New Mexico Senator John Pinto has been urging state legislators for funding to expand U.S. Route 491. On March 26, his pleas were answered. Governor Susana Martinez announced \$78 million to finish the road construction.



For families in the Former Bennett Freeze Area residing on lands that have been motionless for over 48 years, we are making headway on your behalf for home repairs and construction.

The Navajo-Hopi Land Commission Office continues their active search for funding to address housing, home repairs and grazing management.

The commission developed a detailed project management plan for \$2 million in NAHASDA funding. This will be for new home construction.

Additionally, funding from the Navajo Rehabilitation Trust Fund was utilized to re-roof nine homes in the Former Bennett Freeze area have been re-roofed and assess 20 other homes for work.

CLIMBING CHIEF MANUELITO'S LADDER OF EDUCATION .

For our students at home and those pursuing higher education at colleges and universities across the country, the Navajo Nation Washington, D.C. Office continues to monitor legislation on your behalf.

Like the Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act, which is aimed at enhancing the learning opportunities for our Navajo kids.

Others like the Alternative Accountability Workbook is focused on cutting red tape and strengthening our Navajo sovereignty. The workbook will provide the Nation with an alternative to the Adequate Yearly Progress formula currently in use by states.

The Navajo Nation continues striving for self-determination in the education of our children. We need to address the disparity that exists with funding our college students.

For FY 2014, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance awarded scholarships to 4,792 students

for a total of \$16,954,052.

However, 6,260 students were turned away due to the lack of funds.

For our college students studying to become our future leaders, we must think outside the box for scholarships and financial aid that will give them the needed support to reach their educational goals.

VETERANS' HOUSING AND LIVING THE GOLDEN RULE.

We have not forgotten the faithful duty and sacrifice of our Navajo veterans that served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

In February, the Navajo Nation Department of Veterans Affairs executed their FY 2014 \$1.9 million housing project to construct 75 new homes this year.

The goal is 300 homes in the next four years. We will find the money to ensure these homes are properly equipped with appliances and heating. There should be no shortcut when it comes to housing our veterans.

The only way these important initiatives are done is by working together. For our government to properly function, we must collaborate and pull these many projects and initiatives forward for the benefit of the Navajo people.

Let's rewind the clock back five years ago.

Our Nation was in turmoil from the push to reduce the Council from 88 to 24 members. The battle cry was government reform and a reduction in costs for services from our legislators.

Here we are, five years later, and we all know that was not the case.

Not only did costs rise, but the workload also doubled and tripled in some cases. In spite of these challenges, we

Our college kids need scholarships.

President Shelly met with Arizona State University students on April 11 and listened to concerns ranging from scholarships, cultural sensitivity and tribal leadership. The biggest need: scholarships.



Health care is a priority of the Nation.

Vice President Jim and Larry Curley have been working on the FY 2015 budget for an additional \$200 million to complete IHS health care facilities in Kayenta and Dilkon.





worked together and stabilized our government from those uncertain times.

Gone are the days of demeaning press releases being thrown back and forth between the Executive and Legislative Branches of government. If you recall, five years ago, it was like watching school kids arguing over name calling on the playground.

We have matured a lot since then, but we must do more and observe the Golden Rule, especially when we have disagreements.

Effective communication, conflict resolution, peacemaking and difficult discussions were the focus on April 5, when Vice President Rex Lee Jim hosted Navajo Nation Golden Rule Day.

The Golden Rule is simple: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Basically, this means treat others like you would like to be treated.

This simple teaching is a philosophy we have already been taught by our Navajo elders when they told us to "walk in beauty" and live in harmony with the world.

On July 5, 2013, Vice President Jim received the Golden Rule International Award from the Peace and Humanities International. There are 120 nations globally that observe Golden Rule Day. We can now be added to that list.

Navajo Nation Golden Rule Day began with prayer and a 5K run. The daylong event featured guest speakers and sessions on difficult conversations, conflict resolution, peacemaking and effective communication.

It's important for us to remember that it is okay to disagree and have opposing opinions on matters. What we must practice is being respectful of different views. There is no need for animosity and grudges.

Let's not fall back into the hole we were in five years ago, when nothing moved, except petty news and bickering. We've come this far working together and we still have much more ground to cover.

Through our partnership with the Navajo Nation Council

and our mutual commitment to work together for the Navajo people, we have accomplished great feats.

Like the Navajo Nation General Leasing Act of 2013.

In February, I met with the U.S. Department of Interior in Washington, D.C. to obtain approval of this legislation. The Secretary of the Interior will give approval this month.

The 120-day review period is over. The Act has been approved by statute and we are awaiting the official announcement.

We can now streamline residential and business site leasing through the Navajo Nation General Leasing Act.

We will have the authority to approve leases without involvement from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It is another step toward true self-determination.

Other tribes from across Indian Country have used our General Leasing Act as a template to expedite approval of residential home site leases, schools, religious sites, agriculture, energy and grazing.

THANK YOU, SENATOR JOHN PINTO FOR NEVER GIVING UP.

We continue to lead the way on our journey to build a nation.

Nation building would not be possible without roads to get us to our respective destinations. Recently, construction for one major artery on the Navajo Nation was announced.

For more than 20 years, New Mexico Senator John Pinto has been urging state legislators to complete four-lane construction on U.S. Route 491.

On March 25, at a roadside ceremony near Sheep Springs, New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez and I announced that \$78 million would be allocated to U.S. 491 to finish the remaining 21.8 miles of construction.

U.S. Route 491 was formerly named U.S. 666 and was

Working with FEMA during disasters.

The Navajo Department of Emergency Management has made tremendous headway in recapturing reimbursement funds from FEMA disaster declarations on the Nation. Some were on the books for more than a decade.



Dine' bizaad is our strength and power.

The strength of our Nation can be found in Dine' bizaad, the Navajo language. It is our shield and protector, the essence of its power demonstrated by our Navajo Code Talkers in World War II.





informally known as the “Devil’s Highway,” because of the countless accidents and fatalities that occurred on the two-lane roadway.

Senator John Pinto made it his mission to widen the road and his efforts have paid off, as accidents and fatalities have decreased on the four-lane segments.

With the construction of Navajo Route 20 in the Western Agency and now, U.S. Route 491 in the Eastern and Northern Agencies, this is the first time two major roads have been constructed during one administration of tribal leadership.

NAVAJO DOT CONTINUES ROAD INITIATIVES FOR THE NATION.

The Navajo Division of Transportation is also currently working with the Arizona Department of Transportation to address another dangerous stretch of road that has claimed many lives.

When traveling westbound on State Road 264 from Window Rock, you may have noticed road crews thinning trees and branches in the right-of-way area between the summit and Ganado.

This is in preparation of work to widen the road in this area, which has also seen its fair share of accidents over the years. While this initiative will take years to complete, the good news is that it is finally underway.

Through my directive last year, Navajo DOT also began working with Navajo leaders in the Arizona Legislature regarding funding from our Navajo Nation Fuel Excise Tax.

A tax of 17 cents is imposed on each gallon of fuel purchased on the Navajo Nation. For diesel, the tax is 25 cents per gallon. These funds go into the Navajo Nation Road Fund.

An average of \$12 million is collected annually and used to fund road and airport improvements on the Nation.

From that amount, \$3 million is distributed to road maintenance, \$3 million to the Road Fund, \$2 million to the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund and \$4 million to the State of Arizona.

That is, until now.

With the assistance of Arizona Senator Carlyle Begay, I am happy to report that the \$4 million in FET funds that previously went to Arizona will now stay on the Nation for our road projects.

There’s much more to report to you on the progress of the Nation over the past quarter. These are just a few highlights of things we have been working on.

Later this week, please take the time to read our newsletter - *Hozhooji Nahat’á Ba Hane’* – for more information on the work and progress we’ve made since the winter session.

We look forward to strengthening and growing our relationship with the Navajo Nation Council. Together, we can do great things for our Nation and our people.

Ahe’hee.



**NAVAJO NATION OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT**

P.O. BOX 7440

WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA 86515

PHONE: 928-871-7000

FAX: 928-871-4025

WWW.PRESIDENT.NAVAJO-NSN.GOV